



KLERICH 2024-04-11

## THE GREAT ZERO (ÉCONOMIE LIBIDINALE, PARIS 1974) JEAN-FRANCOIS LYOTARD: LIBIDINAL ECONOMY

BIOPOLITICS, ECONOFICTION DESIRE, INTENSITY, LIBIDINAL ECONOMY, LYOTARD

In “Lyotard zur Einführung” (in JUNIUS), Walter Reese-Schäfer is obviously not able to do much with the LÖ. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that “the crisis of dissolution” of a socialist group (19) was certainly an occasion for writing the LO, but that at its core it is about something fundamentally existential: about despair (18 and 155) – and not about his own life, but about despair in the face of the condition humaine. Specifically: “It was a crisis that was linked to the end of all attempts to subject politics to moral criteria.” (Lyotard – in an interview with Reijen and Veerman, *ibid.* 155)

Against this background, Lyotard “set himself the goal of abandoning the orientation towards the dichotomy (good/evil) in favor of the concept of intensities” (154; italics & brackets by us).

The LÖ can be understood as a counter-pendulum movement to logocentrism, to reason-fixated philosophy, here in particular Marxist social theory. In the latter, we assume phenomena such as a general fetishism etc., but ultimately view the subjects as rational beings. Lyotard now takes the opposite position when he attempts to destroy all meaning. In contrast to logocentrism, this attitude could be described as affectivism or affect-centrism. The latter seems as inappropriate as the former. However, the ‘exaggeration’ focuses on a blind spot and the reading provides a deeper understanding of the failure of traditional Marxism. The aim is to attach greater importance to the analysis of libidinal occupations and to include the primary processual, non-rational movements. Hence a clear rejection of dialectics and the concept of alienation. Rather: “Starting from scratch with the revolution means ... understanding the nonsense, the madness differently, no longer as evil. ... One can occupy quantity as such and that is not alienation ...”. LÖ 146

Lyotard’s main criticism of representation in the libidinal philosophy is that it is nihilistic. He draws an analogy between representational structures and Friedrich Nietzsche’s characterization of religion and transcendental philosophy as forms of nihilism. For Nietzsche religion is nihilistic because it places the highest values (as the ground for all values) in a transcendent realm which cannot be accessed, thereby cutting us off from the highest values and devaluing the realm of our actual experience. According to Lyotard, representational theory follows this model by placing the reality that representation refers to in a transcendent realm. Lyotard expresses this nihilism in terms of what he calls “the Great zero.” This zero is the divide between representation and what it represents. Representation is nihilistic because it can never close the divide between representation and reality, effectively cutting off representational thought from access to reality. What is represented is constantly deferred. For Lyotard semiotics is a prime example of representational nihilism, because the definition of the sign is that it replaces something (negating that which it replaces).

Ashley Woodward, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/lyotard/#H3> (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy IEP)

Libidinal Economy opens with the strange “Joycean” sentence (cf. the first sentences, LÖ 7)

Thus transformed body is turned into a strip which, if one would connect and twist its two ends, would resemble the Moebius volume 14. This is the place where desire (désir, Wunsch), i.e. pure energy incessantly circulates. Lyotard calls it the “Zero point” – one cannot go any further.

Piotr Schollenberger, LYOTARD’S LIBIDINAL MODERNISM (2016)

Lyotard is right when he says: “So it is definitely not a lidibo theater, not a closed space, because intensities sometimes run here, sometimes there, build up and disappear, without ever being able to lock them into the stage space of a theater hall, into a scene.” (LÖ 9) And he is also right on the subject of WITHOUT lack: “If you want to describe this implantation, this fixing of currents, you have to move from drive to representation, but without resorting to the suspicious help of a concept of lack, the help of the trick with the empty otherness, a

blank space, a zero..." (LÖ 9) More, always more – that is also possible without lack, simply because more is more: more is more is more... No, "the libido lacks nothing and also not areas of occupation..." (LÖ 10) "It occupies unconditionally." (LÖ 11) And yes to the duplicity of the drive... (see below)

What is this ZERO all about?

- The Zero is a figure, part of a powerful dispositive... a dispositive of encircling and ensnaring, in which of course several libido positions are confirmed together... (LÖ 11)
- ... we will not only prove that it is not necessary to pass through this dispositive in order to follow the course of the intensities through the labyrinth, but also that the passage through the Zero is even a special path of the libido, that the positing of the signifier or the great other ... is a pleasurable positing, that the "severity of the law" makes quite a few people horny, and that with this Zero we are by no means dealing with an ontological necessity, but with a religious, i.e. libidinal fantasy, which one could certainly accept if it were not terroristic and compulsive. We must therefore develop an affirmative, an affirmative idea of the Zero. (Note 2 "affirmative" as the opposite of nihilistic) (LÖ 12) – Does Zero refer to language, the system of signifiers? Language in its binary structure? In contrast, the aim is an event as with the Roman deities described, i.e. singularities (see Klossowski below).
- We (have) understood that the reintroduction of the zero, that is, the negative, into the economy of desire means only the calculability of the libido material, means only political economy, capital, which is transferred into the sphere of passions, and we have understood that with this economy of capital, again necessarily, piety pursues itself, the instinctive and passionate dispositive of religiosity, insofar as it is understood as a force of lack, as capitalist religiosity, which is a religiosity of money that – causa sui – produces itself. (LÖ 12)
- Augustine had crossed over into the camp of the great Zero and called for resignation: give up the libido band, he says, the only thing worth affects is my Zero, my Other, through him you get all emotions, you owe them to him, so keep them for him, give them back to him, he will repay you, the Savior. (LÖ 16)
- What interests us is the sign in the Roman-Klossowskian sense of sugibus and pertunda, the unique tensor with its crazy multiplicity of directions: we are not out to separate it from the "bad", nihilistic sign (Plato, Saussure, Peirce)... to bring it to safety from the great, semiotic-semiotizing Zero... Rather, in the coarseness of interchangeable signs, to trace the unrepeatable singularities of the passage of affects... on the zero of the capital, the signifier, grasp the this side or the other side of this movement... because of what forces it to produce itself; not because it channels, but because it drifts. (LÖ 28)
- There is not even suffering on the one hand, pleasure on the other: this dichotomy belongs to the order of the organic body, the instance imagined as a unity, it requires the work of separation, of negation, which the pleasure principle accomplishes by ensuring that what is unpleasant is spat out and only what is pleasant is let in, the pleasure principle, which is also the reality principle... Freud's little fairy tales already presuppose what they supposedly make comprehensible: 'the formation of duality, of the substitute sign, of the inner theater that doubles an outer reality (and vice versa), and thus also the emergence of the caesura, the injury, the rupture, which create an access to the inner... all these fairy tales already stand in the duality of the Zero (the One, the own person, object or subject, the ego...) and the Intensity (the pleasure, the pain, both together).' (LÖ 33)

On the duplicity of the two drive principles (LÖ 35 ff.): Two principles, but one instance

There is no remarkable difference between a libidinal and a discursive formation... Both

formations are formations. A libidinal dispositive ... is formally a structure. (LÖ 35) When Freud introduces the death drive, he ... wants to secure the entire libido economy against the concept and the binaristic distinction. It is not at all a question of dividing the instances, that is the so-called “work” of the concept. “On the contrary, it is a matter of making their imminent blending possible at all times, of making the question unanswerable as to whether a certain configuration is more an effect of death than of life, whether a certain flooding or release of drives is more suicidal than therapeutic from the point of view of the psychic apparatus that experiences it, whether, on the contrary, a certain congestion, blockage, crystallization of a stable dispositive points to a saving orthopaedics rather than to a deadly entropy. (LÖ 37/38)

But why and how can one proceed from the two principles of life and death if one cannot distinguish them by their respective functions, if the composite units can amount to life just as much as to death? What use are two principles if every effect can be traced back to both of them? (LÖ 40)

So not duality, but duplicity. Thought, too, is libibo, force (intensity), incessant restlessness, glowing duplicity. One must avert the fate that thinking ascribes to the concept, otherwise one develops a libidinous economy that resembles a trivial political economy, that is, an ideology with a claim to order that is incapable of grasping the duplicity of so-called economic processes. (LÖ 41)

Above all, you must understand that the two principles of Eros and death ... are not two instances, each endowed with its own principle of operation, which would allow them to be identified on the basis of their respective effects or symptoms in the “psyche” or on the body. ... there is an instinctual machine which functions on its own account, and this machine is not set in motion by death or by Eros, but by both. (LÖ 66/67 – underlining by us)

Continue with ZERO (nothing, nothingness, zero, zero point)

- ...from one term to another term. And if you have a religious soul like Freud or Lacan, you can fabricate the image of a great signifier that is always and eternally absent (absence metaphysics, deus absconditus) and whose only presence consists in the evaporation, retention and dissolution of terms, which then form signs from them – which substitute each other. In other words, the image of a great Zero that constantly keeps these terms separate from one another and whose – naturally unpronounceable – name will be translated as castrator in the libidinal economy (LÖ 56; cf. intensities pp. 130 to 134 and the theme of “no principle” 143/44).
- 
- Lyotard assumes “that desire also encompasses capitalism, that it thus corresponds to it in some way, that it is therefore not a libidinal nothingness...” (130) Baudrillard rejects the thesis that political economy is based on the misrecognition of desire – and Lyotard rejects Baudrillard’s thesis that it is based on the rejection of castration... ‘and that desire is determined by castration: “Far from seeing in this castration, this negative, in what we call here the great Zero, the order of desire, which is the movement of energy, we see in it rather the order of capital in the broadest sense, in that of theology, which capitalizes the affects in the instance of the Other, a figure of desire. And Baudrillard could rightly say of our libidinal economy that it excludes castration and thus desire.” In fact, Lyotard positions the libidinal economy primarily beyond representation; thus, one could say that Baudrillard’s thesis contains only one of countless possibilities of libido distribution, but certainly not the only

one.

In contrast, Lacan installs and maintains an order (S1) with the so-called symbolic castration (which then, however, somehow begins a life of its own with the capitalist discourse through the small twist...). For Lyotard, so to speak, every order tends to desire its disorder. This is because “the economy of desire cannot be fixed, not even as ambivalence, not only because it is Eros and death drive, but because the effects of both instances cannot be determined...” (133) “There is just as much libidinal intensity in capitalist exchange as in so-called ‘symbolic’ exchange. This must be said, provocatively or affirmatively, as a comment on our sentence ‘There is no primitive society.’” (133)

- Even if one assumes that “the savages” do not convert their goods into capital – it is “the least mercantile instance of the Zero... which permits and even requires the establishment of an exact balance of income and expenditure of effects (...) and which hovers over these societies and maintains them” (133/34). Extreme intensities and ambivalence... “the most important thing is that these indisputable intensities can also be read as terms of order and even of return to order, that the tensions that suddenly inscribe themselves on the margins or at the center of the social surface belong fully to it, and not at all in a subversive sense, on the contrary: they literally hold it together and circulate on it like interchangeable, intelligible semiotic signs.” (134) “This dissimulation of intensities into values and of values into intensities is no less effective in capitalist society. There is a capitalizing order of savages (...), just as there are powers wandering in the signs of capital. Not in its margins... but in its ‘core’, in the most important ... processes of exchange.” (134/35) It is “very difficult to recognize the desire of capital, which can enter into instances here and there...” And “there is also the occupation of capital’s time, this strange saving and simultaneous anticipated spending of libidinal intensities that underlies the banking and monetary system...” Or “quite simply the occupation of the system as such, in general...”, the occupation of value and of terms “which only have value through ‘difference’ or postponement, and the occupation of the laws of these postponements – (...) – can all these occupations not generate dizzying intensities?” (135/36)
- There can certainly be a “feeling evoked by the great Zero as a desire for a return” – after all, “pleasure is unbearable” (138). “There are libidinous positions that can be held or not, there are occupied positions from which the energies are suddenly withdrawn and transferred to other pieces of the great puzzle, where they invent new fragments and new forms and possibilities of pleasure, that is, of intensification.” (138)
- Lyotard says that “the central Zero... does not necessarily have to be money (...) but is always the center of language and the sword”; the reference back to or submission to a central Zero (149) leads to a hierarchization of drives and social groupings that occupy a privileged position (148).
- On page 189, there is talk of the “Zero of the money-judge” and “its annulling function assumed by Aristotle”, in which “all opposites of exchange are neutralized – that is, all things taken together, this Zero is exactly the same as that which makes Aristotle, as money, the judge of economic exchange. Its distributive justice consists above all in annulling the opposite poles of exchange and also the exchange partners themselves, in that one wants (...) what the other has.” What is needed is a tertium, “an objective value, a measure common to both objects of exchange”. The motto here is “that there is nothing to gain, that everything is exchanged and that the balance is zero. The gold of my wisdom, says Socrates, is zero. This is the virtue that the politeia demands: to relate strictly to the zero of the exchange of drives, to live without loss or gain, to regulate the circulation of libidinal energies according to the minimax principle, according to the minimum of losses and the

maximum of gains, so that both partners can play a zero-sum game (the exchangeable quantities are constant) and obtain complete information (each knows what the other will demand in the center: as in a game of zero in chess." (193) Thus it becomes clear what is meant by "a return to zero everywhere, neutralization by the zero" (192): "Lust in its political-economic perversity counts on a profit and discounts what it offers: Let us procure a drive discharge as profitably as possible and with the least loss." – So far and so much for the "general theory of the market... in the form of simple mercantilism, which is political" (193).

- On the role of money in this: money is "the unit as money of calculation and the neutral element as money of payment: an agreement on what has been made a need by convention. For need can disappear in money. Money is the zero of need." ... "The need arises through the desire preserved in the canon of identity; it is interchangeable because it is not different or indifferent." (196) This zero-money is also "something else: it is a temporal instance, namely the eternal presence of the possible exchange, i.e. of the possibly arising need and possibly existing goods. This is the 'omnipresence' of the market and the community." "All that remains is the zero of the money paid (satisfied need, consumed good), which has passed into the hands of the seller. This seller, for his part, feels no need; the zero in his hand guarantees me and all of us (who belong to the circulation) that he will bring it back into circulation for certain goods of ours." ... "Need is the political-economic form of desire..." Since it is "affordable, it is also predictable." (197)
- Lyotard clearly saw "that utility has no meaning at all in the common understanding of use value, that it can only be determined in relation to the law of exchange" (214) But this little blow (against utility in marginal utility?) does not mean that he rejected use value: "When one invests in commodities (including means of production), one submits to the regulation of metamorphoses: for production is consumption, and the products must in turn be consumed. In this sense, the so-called use value ... is an indispensable component of the reproduction system." (285 – see below)
- Did not "the power of the nefarious philosopher" de Sade consist in the fact that he understood the Zero, "the mechanism of circle and rotation" (218)? "How is the experience of pleasure located in the circle?" (218) "There can still be the possibility of relating the intensities that are denied to individual subjects to a huge hyper-subject that, all in all, consists only of the same Zero that summarizes the peripheral pleasures of citizens." (219) Here, however, one would then have to "introduce another Zero, a second death..." (in our opinion, this "further Zero" should not be confused with the "two kinds of Zero", see 252 below) "...this Zero is no longer at the center, but at the periphery of the circle, it circulates at the periphery and it twists, crumples and stretches it in order to bring it as close as possible to the labyrinthine body band." (219) For example, in prostitution (as well as in the analytical situation): the prostitute (like the analyst) must not feel pleasure – this is the prerequisite (for controlling the countertransference in the analysis) – both neutralize the pleasure experience of the other and mediate it "to the zero of interchangeability – with the help of payment" (222). It is always about the "formation of an instance to which the instinctual movements can be related and which in turn can transport the instinctual movements... Whether one calls this instance an individual, an ego (moi), a social person, or whether, on the contrary, one insists on its nullity, its absence or its zero quality – it is always one and the same instance." (223) However, money does not yet work here "in its capacity as credit, that is, as an offer to the partner to make his purchase of goods or services before the final payment" – it is (only) about the "intensity of consumption" (235). The capitalist, on the other hand, "sees Europe as a body for investment and occupation that yields something" (in mercantilism Colbert's luxury and splendor, in capitalism profit and gain). "Real capital money is not treasure, nor earth, but a relation – and a relation of power, for one must have the power to give something in advance by granting credit, and the power to profit from it

by proving oneself solvent; but it is a relation of separation of desire from itself, of inhibition and rejection of libidinal energies... Capitalist money is in a certain sense only time given and taken back, anticipated and retarded. Mercantilist money is an erotic and deadly affair." (236)

- "Money becomes the general equivalent to make foreign peoples, their riches ('products') and their poverty ('needs') commensurable with the commodities they buy. And as such it is clearly nothing other than the central zero of the encirclement and the ultimate zero of every mercantile circuit. It determines the price because it defines the assessable relationships between the quantity, supply and demand of goods. Money thus proves to be a ratio, a calculation." (240) But "the equilibrium of national balances, that is, the rule of zero" (235) is not certain: "The equivalent conceals a vampire" and "the vampire conceals something greater than the equivalent, namely capital itself... We say: the tensor is concealed in the exchangeable sign and vice versa. Power is concealed in power and vice versa. But what remains of this (...) dissimulation of mercantile money in capitalism?" (240)
- Capitalism is about "keeping the jade stick erect and ensuring that ejaculation does not take place" (244) – in other words, about "coitus reservatus" (245). Above all, those who focus their attention on enjoyment, on Lacan's plus-de-jouir, should take note of this – before they draw the wrong conclusions here (and simply make surplus value and more-enjoyment analogous, homologous or identical). Capitalism is about a shift – and this shift presupposes "the production of subjects, that is, of unitary and empty instances that, by definition, can never be sufficiently 'possessed', since they are only a zero for binding the drives to an instance. This conclusion leads us close to so-called 'modern' problems, such as Lacan's, who emphasizes concepts such as 'the failure of desire' or 'the unattainability of the libidinal object.'" (245) Lacan had registered this in the Capitalist Discourse in Milan 1972 (derived from the discourse of the master) as a "small inversion" (une toute petite inversion entre le S1 et le S): The classical master-servant relationship is replaced by a relationship where individuals imagine themselves to be masters, even though they are subject to capital, or subject to capital. Of course, it is now about capital accumulation and multiplication (250), no longer about so-called simple reproduction, but about expanded reproduction – about "completely new intensities" (251): "What does pleasure look like inside the circle, ... what about pleasure in capitalism itself?"
- There are "two kinds of zero; and these two kinds of zero are hidden in the functional mechanism of capital itself... it is a functional mechanism that is in principle related to a central zero, i.e. to a standard commodity, to a general structural law of equivalence; it is governed by a certain use of money (as a unit of account, means of payment or creditor); and in this use there is simultaneously and inseparably concealed a convulsive anti-functioning which endangers the system of reproduction – for example in the form of what is called speculation, which is much more than speculation and has the same significance for the productive use of money as anti-matter has for matter" (252). This characterization of speculation in terms of an anti-function appears problematic insofar as speculation also has a system-stabilizing aspect. In general, all capitalist production contains a speculative element, since it is more or less uncertain whether the produced commodity will find a buyer in circulation at the previously calculated price.

There is "a zero of annulment and a zero of conquest", "a zero of value or price and a zero of profit or surplus value. We can then distinguish between two types of conquest, that by annexation and that by robbery, which are hidden in the credit function of capitalist money, i.e. in the zero of profit. This is precisely the dissimulation that is constantly spoken of here; it determines everything that exists in terms of intensity on the side of capital. The capitalist (...) is a conqueror..., a monster, a centaur: its front part feeds itself by reproducing the regulated

system of metamorphoses controlled by the law of the standard commodity, and its rear part by plundering the excessively excited energies. With one hand it appropriates, that is, conserves, i.e. it reproduces in equivalences, reinvests; with the other it takes and destroys, steals and flees by opening up new spaces, a new time. However, the symmetry of these formulas is deceptive. The same monetary and mercantile signs that are generally regarded as economic signifiers, i.e. that refer back to other signs, can also be completely different signs and destructive desires. Reproduction conceals destruction, and destruction can conceal reproduction, but above all the labyrinthine times of destruction cannot be derived from the unified time of reproduction." The "deviation produced by the introduction of a new element into the system" is canceled again "if it is a homeostatically regulated whole". The system is brought back to the amount of energy it had before – and even if it is "designed for growth, nothing changes in the feedback model: only the size of the reference point is then no longer  $n$ , but  $\Delta n$ . This is the same model (with Sraffa) as" with Freud: "The erotic functioning ensures the cohesion of the whole. This eros is centered on a zero: namely, on the zero of homeostatic regulation and, more generally, the annulment of every deviation that does not fit the system and every threatening event through feedback (i.e. through repetition for the purpose of integration)." (252/53) So much for one side!

- The other side is discussed as The Nihilistic Theory of the Credit Zero (257 ff.). This is the "other Zero, which does not operate from a center, like money in the Nicomachean Ethics, which is concerned with the balancing annulment of the relations between goods and needs." (257) It is therefore a different "zero, which, thrown into the exchange circuit itself, so to speak, obviously enables an expansion of the sphere of exchange and an increase in its volume, in other words, an enrichment, money is no longer regarded as a means of payment... but as credit." (257) What is the other? Why is this Zero not a "homeostatically regulated whole" (see 253 above)? How can it be otherwise?
- Lyotard explores this question on the basis of the "three forms of monetary economy (chrematistics), i.e. three procedures for satisfying needs" according to Aristotle – although in my opinion he could have worked out the point of the "reversal of the relationship between commodities and money" (259) even more clearly:

1. economies without money and without exchange (subsistence) – "perfectly organic" (257)
2. if "an excess of goods occurs here and of needs there, a new need for exchange becomes visible among the natural communities" – whereby the goods mutate (dissimulate) from means of consumption to means of exchange; and "naturally" the question now arises here: how much of good A against how much of good B? What is similis, equivalent, equivalent, commensurable, etc.?
3. the moment money intervenes and splits the act into two completely separate parts, the barrel is opened: Even if the tertium (medium of exchange) is initially still a good (metal) – the exchange value of the same is (except in the case of fixed prices) more abstract and unclear than in the case of consumer goods. In other words: from now on, wanting to have and wanting to give will always be about more or less – which is the birth of the dealer, who is only concerned with money.

(4) But trading in order to make more money, says Aristotle, is "against nature" or "a process that harbors a dangerous infinity", because it "can no longer be limited or stopped by need", but only by the amount of money, which is, however, "increased by this very process" (258).

5 Here we are at the point where need turns into desire. A need, says Lacan, can be satisfied,



but desire cannot. Credit can now dissimulate and work wonders: If it was originally an advance in kind or realia (e.g. grain), then one in (limitedly available) metal money, book money has opened up the journey to infinity, because this nothingness (the credit zero) can be multiplied infinitely, since the sign of exchangeability or purchasing power has no value in itself and (apart from data carriers) is almost no longer bound to anything earthly (in the “ideal case” only a digital information, a binary and somewhere “stored” code that means a number / amount of money). Wealth has become completely abstract.

- The question remains as to what is going on here in terms of libido economy – especially if, as Freud said, the psychic system is geared towards homeostasis or Eros is centered on the zero of annulment (253). If this is the case, then why this “reversal of relations” (259), why perversion? “Does the merchant not activate and expand the commercial circuit by bringing new forms of exchange onto the scene that previously seemed to be highly useless and even unnatural?” Why does he allow goods to circulate “in favor of monetary energy, energy as money”? Why (from an Aristotelian point of view) the abuse of money? Because money simply cannot be limited to its use? Because every limit also invites transgression?

On Hegel's attempt to justify the “independence of the means (...of money) ... on the basis of an inhibition\* of desire” – unmediated desire is destructive (259), inhibition prevents the ‘destructive’ fulfillment of desire (261) and prevents immediate occupation (262) – Lyotard says of this attempt: “The weakness of such an analysis is striking” (263). In a “closed energy system” (263/64), where only redistribution is possible, “the total volume of the system does not grow” (264). “If the increase to be introduced into circulation is already present in its own way, if it suffices to deny the fulfillment of desire in order to release new energy resources, then they are not created by a saving – be it forced or voluntary.” (264) “Either the saving is really a saving, which implies the assumption of inhibition on condition that it is supplemented by the assumption of a finite quantity of libidinal wealth; or it is, under the name of saving, the introduction of quantities of energy into the system with which one is dealing, but it is important that the system is not isolated and does not get its energy increase through an internal inhibition, but through external expansion, that is, through the development of ‘external’ energy sources.” Savings is either money that you have (but are holding back, saving), or it is money that you have not yet (earned) and are borrowing (credit) – i.e. equity vs. borrowed capital. However, credit is only “savings” if someone already has this money; credit money ex nihilo is of course not savings (but an expansion of the money supply). “In the second hypothesis, the enjoyment, or rather the intensity, would not be located” in withholding (264), but in the “excitement... that the ‘unnatural’ eroticism or money economy evokes in the energy deposits that were originally protected by the system”, e.g. “natural (coal, water, oil, atom) or human (craftsmen or unemployed farmers) energy masses that are available in the environment of capital and that are seized and exploited by it. Thus the intensities of which capitalism is capable are not exclusively connected with inhibition or reserve formation, but they are necessarily connected with conquest and excitement.” (265; see above Zero of Conquest, 252)

The chapter was entitled: “The nihilistic theory of credit zero”; what is “nihilistic” about credit zero? That one starts from something that one does not (yet) have – a product successfully sold in circulation? On the condition (see 263/64 above) of a closed energy system, credit is presumably nihilistic insofar as it ends up like the game of Monopoly... (But who knows

whether Lyotard means this; for he says that “the system is undoubtedly in equilibrium, though not in expansion” (264); certainly not “in expansion” – but “in equilibrium”? (Cf. his Kaufmann example p. 264)

“No,” he says 265 below, “nihilism springs entirely from the idea that the good, the serious, and the true are contained in the return\* and the institution of potency\*; and from the idea that inhibition changes for the better the character and range of the forces which are subjected to it.” (265) “Any political economy that assumes this becomes identical with philosophies of consciousness based on the sinister ‘power of the negative’. The task of capital is to find out how desire as an affirmative force can become a reserve and an institution.” (265/66)

“If desire is purely destructive, as Hegel believes, why should a redoubling of its negative force reverse the nature of its effects?” What is inhibited in the drive movement anyway? “Is not the destructive potency precisely its power, its strength? What is taken away from the libido...?” So why “should the same power, if it is intent on its ‘goal’, on its expansion, be destructive, destructive or evil, and why should it”, as Hegel assumed, “become good when it turns back, turns in on itself and fights itself” (265)? Cf. asceticism and renunciation, monasteries and prison...

In the intensities it looked as if (127) the economic signs could free themselves from their anchoring and no longer have to maintain “an outside, a reference, a naturalness”... Especially since they do not designate things or objects, but “merely” a social relationship. And it has long since ceased to be about inhibition, but – on the contrary – about (excessive) disinhibition...

After this somewhat complicated detour via Hegel, it is clear that “the advance of money-capital... cannot consist in the simple, anticipated inclusion of energy reserves in circulation”: “it contains two libidinal functions that are almost incompatible: on the one hand an extended accumulation and on the other robbery; but both are concerned with the conquest, capture and expropriation of new patchwork pieces. Because these two functions are hidden together in credit money, it is impossible to reconcile the meaning of the two zeros and the two forms of money in such a way that one could say, for example, that the zero of central annulment... corresponds to payment money (...) and that credit money in turn implies the other zero” (266) – the “other” zero is, of course, the above-mentioned zero of conquest (252), expansion, enlargement and enrichment (257). Why is this not possible? Because, says Lyotard, “we are not dealing with two monies and two functions, but with two monies and three functions: The regulative zero not only acts on the acts of exchange in a homeostatic system, it is also still contained in the capital advance that makes expanded reproduction possible; in other words, credit money must also be thought of as payment money that regulates a system of growth, and finally, the same credit money can also show itself, on the contrary, as the most significant de-regulating force of all capitalist circuits. So two monies: Means of payment and credit; three functions: Homeostasis, dynamic equilibrium and disequilibrium.” (266) “Disparity of two aspects of money”, it was said in Deleuze-Guattari’s AÖ 305: flow of purchasing power vs. flow of money capital, the latter as the “immense deterritorialized flow that constitutes the full body of capital”. All functions only become distinguishable “in ‘crises’ that are comparable to hysterical fits” – especially the third: the imbalance. (LÖ 266)

With extended reproduction, credit cannot, of course, result from savings, but can only be “an advance of nothing, but not for nothing” (268). Lyotard deals with the theme/problem of Marx’s question (MEW 24:331): Where does the money come from to silver the surplus value (the surplus product)? (astonishing for his time in 1974) correctly: “The new commodities introduced during cycle  $n + 1$  have the same significance for the money advanced as the new commodities of cycle  $n$  have for the money already in circulation. The (re-)productive use of credit is based on the following analogy: the future that it opens up is no different from the past. Since both are identical in principle, they are reversible – and therefore the lender can buy the future.” (269/70)

From a libido-economic point of view, what is going on in the speculative use of credit money (270-286)? “There are no ‘speculators,’ no bad people who commit their crimes behind the backs of honorable capital managers. Monetary capital can be subjected to a use at any time that is only strange or unexpected if, like the economists, one insists on seeing in capital only its reproductive function.” (270) Lyotard recalls mercantilism, which “results in the death by exhaustion of the body it exploits” – “a virtuality of conquest by robbery and waste that is probably always present in economic organizations. The devastating effects of this power of conquest result from the envy or jealousy directed towards money. This envy is an indispensable component of the metamorphoses of capital and can therefore seriously impair the circulation of capital. For speculation is mercantilism within capitalism; it wants to draw the same intensity from money capital as Colbert and Louis XIV drew from metal money. It is pointless to try to deduce the ‘fits of speculative fever’ (as historians and economists express it) from the general constitution of the economy. It has been thought that capital is then engaged in a direction where the expected rates of profit are higher than in production, when the incentive to invest is insufficient. But this reasonable explanation completely fails to recognize the libidinal difference that this shift of capital entails. The stock market offers no better investment opportunities; it has nothing to do with investment at all, it is a terrain of war and conquest by buying and selling. The sophisticated money that is traded here is not engaged in producing, but in robbing.” (270/71). The “forces of destruction” do not only manifest themselves in wars – “Destruction is concealed in the most peaceful production, death in the accumulation of wealth. One cannot even say that it is the destiny of capital to lead to the collapse of societies through its process of accumulation. For this is by no means certain; this dialectic, with the hope or fear of catastrophe that it predicts, is very religious. Just as the death instincts are hidden in the life instincts, the destructive forces cannot be separated from the productive forces. And just as the lytic (tending to dissolve) or lethal (leading to death) functions do not belong to any instinct, so it cannot be said that speculation is fatal and production erotic; nor is the opposite less verifiable. And it is not even important to wonder at this ambivalence; it is more important to understand how pleasure or intensity passes from reproduction to predation.” (271) “The infinity of a monetary economy, which Aristotle feared so much, is not and cannot be a peculiarity of the reproductive consumption of capital, since this is limited by the zero of annulment. The infinity of capitalist growth”, Lyotard seems to believe, would be “regulated in principle by a standard commodity” (this comes from Sraffa’s commodity production by means of commodities). And if not, then this is “due to the influence of mercantilism, i.e. a use of capital that is not described as ‘properly capitalist’, since it has an essentially (re-)productive conception of capital” (271/72).

“The boundless boundlessness of mercantilism consists precisely in the fact that no capital is accumulated, i.e. something that is reintroduced into circulation according to the rules of cycles and annulments”, but merely accumulated (let us rather say: accumulated) “quantities of metal that form a treasure for wars and for the display of splendor” (there was more in France, but correspondingly less elsewhere – i.e. no more overall). Colbert was concerned with “the predatory appropriation of wealth”, i.e. with “endangering the survival of the social ‘body’ (which is absolutely necessary for reproduction)” – which is “guided by the drives that are perhaps indispensably effective in the system” (272). One is reminded of Germany in its relationship with Greece, except that today attention is paid to the debt sustainability of the trading “partner” – in other words, to ensuring that it does not die. “The ‘bad infinity’ consists precisely in this plundering, which gives back nothing of what it takes and which can only lead to the exhaustion of the reproductive body. Consumptive accumulation generates an ever-increasing inequality of wealth between the two parts of this ‘body’: it generates, among the pieces of the libidinal patchwork, ever more hateful envy and jealousy in terms of intensities. Aristotle’s infinity is fatal to him because that body which mercantilism exploits is finite and because the process of ever-increasing disparity between the parts of the body must cause it to burst” (272) – “must”? That is the question.

Lyotard then considers the crises of 1921 and 1929 – which cannot and should not be retraced in detail here – only the most important aspects from a libido-economic perspective. One can “look at the mercantilist mechanism as if through a magnifying glass. One can see how powerful instincts of plunder are at work throughout society and how within capital the possibility of that which has no counterweight comes to light – that was the event and that was its affirmative nature. The same applies to the very similar event of speculation with exchange rates, which today disrupts the functioning of world capitalism. For this process, the facts have not yet been clearly established.” (272) Be that as it may, in the crisis of 1929 one can “easily recognize the instinctive duplicity of the use of money: investment (occupation) and speculation, the duplicity of time: once repeated and variously punctual, the duplicity of money itself: Means of payment and treasure, and finally a duplicity of intensity: accumulation through displacement and waste. The two states of excitation are simultaneously present and can at best be recognized separately in their effects; both operate in different regions, the same money-capital operates in two heterogeneous and indistinguishable time-spaces that stand side by side in the same place. Reproductive capital has not activated its speculative function because its previous functioning has become impossible or difficult: what is such an impossibility? When is the reproduction of a system no longer possible? When you say something like this, you are trying to cheaply turn a unique episode, an event, into a tragedy and inscribe it into a dialectical destiny. But if this event proves anything, it is the duplicity of economic signs, even the most abstract and, according to economists, apparently the most innocent. The crisis of 1929 proves that the supposed ‘body’ of society – in reality billions of scraps of patchwork, united in principle under the paranoid capital law of reproduction – can disintegrate, disintegrate and turn into mush for a long time (until 1950/55...)” – “...without any other ‘cause’ than wild, jealous instincts, which since the First World War have worked incessantly on a use of capital in the sense of the chrematistics feared by Aristotle.” (273) Lyotard, after going into some details about the crisis of 1921 (he refers in particular to Jacques Néré), then asks: “Is there any explanation for this?” And replies: “This is not a matter

for libido economists.” (274) “Keynes describes in libidinous terms what the economists hypocritically called ‘circulation’”, and “Schacht remarked on this occasion that the German word for the value of money is ... currency\*” (275) and *währen* means to last – of which, however, there could no longer be any question in a “time of flight” in which one could only dream of “regaining a reference unit independent of money that could be considered good money” (275): “Every ‘exchange’ becomes an experience and opens the space for an adventure in which death plays a part.” (276) “A deadly torpor in a partial organ of the body of commerce.” (276) The reproductive body has been seized by a “libidinal ‘disorder’”: “the running Muscovite cheese merchant is an effect of a partial libidinal excitation” (277). His race is an “effect” here; but what is he himself, as a trader, an effect of? Effect of the signifiers of money and its chrematistics? Have they grasped his partial drives?

Baudrillard wrote much later (1999) in his book *The Impossible Exchange*: “In Marx’s analysis, the formal abstraction of the commodity establishes a first-level fetishism linked to exchange value. But when passion takes shape beyond value in the doubly abstract passion for money, the latter becomes the object of a higher fetishism that is no longer linked to exchange value but to the non-exchangeable. In this way, the real object – in a first phase – becomes a sign... At a later stage, however, the sign becomes an object again, but no longer a real object, but an object that is much further removed from the real than the sign itself; it becomes an object outside the field of vision, outside representation: a fetish. No longer an object with the potency of a sign, but an object with the potency of an object – a pure, non-representable, non-interchangeable object...” (175/76). Those who “invest” in securities on the stock exchange take these securities “not as signs (of means of production)... but as things that acquire a higher or lower value exclusively through the exchange movements carried out with them. ... a buying movement suffices to raise the value of a security, the buyers being regarded as a minority favored by profit, which can only be envied and jealously regarded; when the tendency is reversed, the envy fades, turns first into reluctance and later leads to a massive sale. The so-called ‘psychological factors’ of the stock market game consist in this peculiar ‘perversion’ (...) of the relationship to capital: the securities become gold...” (LÖ 278/79) “And when we say envy or jealousy, we mean not only: jealousy between subjects, i.e. possessive envy, but also that envy of the whole libido ..., a direct instinctive jealousy, without the mediation of a property boundary, which has the effect that the masses of capital floating on the body of stock market values cannot be evenly distributed on it, but are incessantly shifted on it and thereby create the greatest margins of potency.” (279)

However, the “speculator” is not only “not interested in the (re-)productive value of these shares and bonds” (278), but the purchases of investment securities were also already “from 1925 to 1929 for the most part carried out ‘à la marge’, i.e. with money that was lent at sight...” (279) “Credit money circulates here in a completely different time from that of production capital: there is no longer a natural cycle or a cycle comparable to nature. There is no cycle at all, but only the upward or downward movement or the reversal of stock market prices, which are completely unpredictable in periods of turbulence.” (279) Short-term purchases, “maximum displaceability”... it is a matter of plundering... or “a time of passion and waste” ... “intensive, jealous use of monetary capital.” (280) “It is therefore not enough to state that evil speculators were at work, there was an urge to speculate which seized even the capital intended for reproduction. These are the same people, company managers, presenters of

commercial and industrial companies, who actually love long payment terms and procrastination, but who nevertheless prefer this habit to the pleasures that can be obtained with this mercantilism of the second or third degree.” (281) But this is nothing new – the tulip mania with its forward transactions reached its peak in 1636/37. So it is not a question of “finding out why there was stock market speculation; for ... there always has been; and we add: It is a libidinal form of expression which, like industrial capitalism (which is no less mysterious, is it?), does not admit of any causal justification.” (281) At least not within a monetary economy... “There is in fact no answer to the question of the shift in libidinal inscription. The fact that the intensity, the force, is more likely to be found in the trade in shares, which are traded as exchangeable things, than in the production of consumable commodities, can be explained just as little as the fact that the libido, which logs in the genital area, moves in the direction of the anus or the ear.” (281) Well, this is not convincing; the question arises as to why an occupation is deducted from x to y, and instead of “ear”, for example, stock exchange would have been more appropriate (although “of course”: why not to the ear? But it would be interesting to know why this is more attractive than x or y). Which is why Lyotard’s assertion: “The (in this sense banal) eroticization of the stock market cannot be explained, but only established.” is not convincing – and why “banal” at all?

It is important for Lyotard to emphasize again that this (the “fact that the same investment can be reproductive or speculative itself”) is not about ambivalence; “what is important is that two different places of occupation are offered to the intensities and that lust can move unpredictably back and forth between the two.” (282) Not ambivalence, but duplicity: “The duplicity of capitalist credit is a co-presence (...) of tensors in the signs and of the signs in the tensors. And signs and tensors do not belong to the same time-space: The signs emerge through the definition of the system within which they are transformable (commutable, translatable, interchangeable); the tensors each individually open up their ephemeral time and their fleeting labyrinthine space.” (282) His explanation of the signs is certainly useful for understanding: the signs are “movable energy packets. The horse of the nomad is only the movable ground... a vehicle – when one moves from the horse to the bill of exchange and from this to the sight credit, then one moves each time in the direction of the most movable. Towards a time and space that is less and less ‘worldly’ or cosmic, but more and more libidinal, labyrinthine and ephemeral.” (283) In speculation, “in this stimulation of circulation, there is always something wild that endangers the time-space of reproduction, which is a reproducible time-space.” (283) The tensorial force of signs comes from dissimulation or (with Deleuze/Guattari) from the movement of deterritorialization, which redefines (or perverts) the system: from the so-called normal to the perverse, from regulation to deregulation. “Even more perversion, even more artefact, until the world becomes so artificial that the movement of deterritorialization creates a new earth.” (AÖ 415).

“Is it necessary to say that all this confusion cannot possibly be described in terms of exploitation and labor power? And the simple structural trains of thought of a Sraffa are obviously also irrelevant.” (283) His dream of a standard commodity is over – “the episode of 73-74 proves precisely that this standard commodity does not exist and that, in a certain sense, it should not exist. If it did exist, where would the confusion come from? And how can there be such confusion in a reproduction that has only itself as its purpose? If investment were regulated with a view to the reproduction of the system, such collapses would be

impossible.” (284) The whole mess is thus anything but paradoxical – it will only appear paradoxical to those who “believe in the law of value, e.g. as in Sraffa, where the complex standard commodity, which is to be freed from the hypothesis of an origin of value, is nevertheless still nourished by the belief in equilibrium and return. This equilibrium is by no means essential. In ‘most modern’ capitalism, under the name of mercantilism, there is speculation, imperialism and unequal exchange, that is, a power that does not arise from order, but from zeal: ‘zeal’ comes from ‘zeal!’” (284) One says: social market economy – but makes it unsocial or asocial, because it is more attractive. That is why “the freeing of exchange rates and the general enforcement of floating – all this goes in the direction of greater shiftability” (284). “In terms of this shiftability, the sometimes long-term investment (i.e. the occupation or settlement) of energies in (re)means of production still appears as something natural, cyclical or regular, it turns the productive body into a kind of soil; the soil of the Neolithic revolution.” (285) That was a long time ago: “There was once a slow, cosmic time, that of seed and fruit, of chicken and egg, of pregnancy and sugar melting. With the monetary ‘signs’ you leave this time and its space. They allow for several times, a lot of time, they are accelerators and decelerators, precisely because they are not forced into (re)production, that is, into consumption and nihilism.” (On annulment, see above) “Their multiplication is not based on their fertility...; it is a concentration of wealth at one pole, which is robbed at the other pole...” (285) “Is this immortal duplicity and dissimulation that of every capitalization?” (286)

Those who are no less interested in the libido of the economy than the economy of the libido will, in my opinion, (have to?) ask themselves whether ecodynamics can be thought of like psychodynamics, i.e. in analogy or homology to psychodynamics – or even identically? Or are there considerable differences here, crunching differences that make any comparison limp or obsolete?

With regard to the possible perversion of money from a means of payment to money capital, Lyotard spoke of a “libidinal ‘disorder’” that seizes the body of reproduction (277) and can or even must “bring it to bursting” (272), of a “deadly solidification in a partial organ...” (276). What is a partial organ? Does he mean the money that the Moscow merchant no longer wants to accept due to high inflation? There is no “partial organ” in the complete register of Freud’s GW. Doesn’t the Psa. only recognize the partial drive (Freud) and the partial object (M. Klein)? In other words, a kind of drive energy (with a source, a whence?) on the one hand and a something towards which it is directed (a goal, a whither?) on the other. Here it is less about a prosaic love object in the sense of a specific person, but “mainly about real or fantasized body parts (breasts, fists, penis) and their symbolic equivalents” (Laplanche/Pontalis 373). Freud, they say, “worked out the equivalences and the relationships that are established between different partial objects (child-penis-feces-money-gift)” (371). “Finally, on the level of symptomatology, fetishism is proof of a possible fixation of the sexual drive to a partial object: we know that Freud defines the fetish as a substitute for the mother’s penis” (372) – a body part fantasized by the child. The term “partial” is of course interesting because it raises the question of the whole, of which “partial” would be a part. “The partial drives initially function independently of each other and strive to unite in the various libidinal organizations.” (373) The term “partial drive” thus correlates “with that of the totality, the organization”, where the various partial drives are “integrated”. According to Freud, they would “first function in an anarchic

state in order to organize themselves secondarily" (374). They are thus thought of as initially "disorganized" – and only later (puberty) as organizing or organized (pregenital vs. genital organization). So much for the theory. The primacy of genitality is known to be (always) threatened by regression. What is particularly important for us is the fact that the drive energy in question, which Lyotard calls libido, can actually be directed towards anything and everything, can "occupy" anything, but can also withdraw its occupation again. In other words, partial drives cannot be organized into a kind of total (body)...

Ashley Woodward draws a disappointing conclusion for leftists from Lyotard on the subject of politics: "Lyotard's interpretation of capitalism in the libidinal economy sees two possibilities inherent in capitalism, each entwined (entangled) and inextricable (unsolvable). On the one hand, capitalism is a good system for the circulation of libidinal energies; it encourages enterprising explorations of and investments in new areas. On the other hand, capitalism tends to hoard up (horten, Schatzbildung, Vorräte) libidinal energy into structured and regulated systems, restricting its flow. This latter tendency is at work in the capitalist exploitation that Marx rallied against. Lyotard interprets these two tendencies of capitalism in terms of the theory of dissimulation. For Lyotard, there is no possible society that is not open to the desire to exploit and hoard libidinal energy in the way the capitalist does. This means that there is no utopian society free from exploitation, either pre-capitalist or post-revolutionary. Lyotard's libidinal politics is not aimed at overthrowing capitalism, then, but of working within it to release the libidinal energies dissimulated within its structures. Practically, this also means working within existing political institutions, but "passively," so as to release as much desire dissimulated within those institutions as possible, without constraining desires through planned outcomes.

However, "disappointing" could also mean the necessary end of a deception. Were we blind to the left eye of libido economics? Have we done the math without the host? Is the idea of comprehensive political-economic planning the result of a dangerous misjudgement of desire – and hubris on the part of a supposedly revolutionary subject?

Piotr Schollenberger quotes Lyotard from *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud* (1973): "The desire which forms and sustains institutions is maintained by investments of energy in the body, language, the earth, cities, sexual and generational differences etc. Capitalism is one of these investments. Capitalism is one of these investments." Here one can only wonder: "one"/ ONE form? Or (44 years later!) THE form? Of course not the only one – there is no question that there are other forms of libidinal investment.

What remains as a provisional summary? Lyotard ruthlessly demonstrates the failure of any (social) critique: either it remains attached to its object through negation and reproduces a correspondingly mirror-inverted "terrorist" zero, or it approaches social conditions from the outside with an insufficiently substantiated concept and understands the latter as alienated (and thus plays God, as it were). Lyotard propagates a pronounced relativization of all theoretical systems by understanding them as merely one of numerous possibilities of a libidinal occupation and thereby foregrounding the shiftability of libidinal occupations. He regards the placement of the libido as the ultimately decisive factor. He thus emphasizes the central power of the primary process, perhaps one could also say: the "determination in the last instance" (Szepanski) through the primary process: first and foremost, there is a desire for



pleasure that always aims to intensify pleasure. This is usually accompanied by a release of the libido, its liquefaction, according to Freud: its free floating. Lyotard sees precisely this tendency, which can also be described as the tendency of the death drive, as the central aspect of the development of capitalism. Symbolizations and, accordingly, the ability to symbolize are increasingly dismantled in favour of the axiomatics of the law of value: ultimately, only the quantitative counts (everything becomes interchangeable and arbitrariness and amnesia develop). This is the critical point of the entire approach: it is precisely in this dissolution of meaningfulness that he sees an opportunity for the development of intensities that are not subject to a terroristic zero. For him, this “affirmative ... affirmative idea of the zero” (12) goes hand in hand with “seeking madness”; this “would mean that one makes of oneself, of one’s body, in this case of language, a permeable conductor for the unbearable. That would be a discourse that is shifted towards excitement and refined for its sake.” 309 (Are we not currently experiencing this in the form of an almost unbearable inflation of ‘language games’, new word creations, shifts in meaning and, in particular, the reversal of supposedly established meanings into their opposite, even deliberate lies (fake news)? To see an ‘escape route’ beyond any programs to be rejected in this difficult to endure destruction of meaning does indeed seem untenable. Accordingly, Lyotard limits himself in his final appeal to “staying where we are, but seizing every opportunity to function as intensity-conducting bodies without making a big fuss. ... Let dissimulation work in favor of intensities.”

311

← PREVIOUS   NEXT →

---

## META

CONTACT

FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX

IMPRESSUM

DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG

## TAXONOMY

CATEGORIES

TAGS

AUTHORS

ALL INPUT

## SOCIAL

FACEBOOK

INSTAGRAM

TWITTER